

Applying Behavioral Economic Theory to Job Search Decision Making Among Vocational Rehabilitation Participants

Vocational rehabilitation (VR) success is often defined as return to competitive work. However, little is known about the decision to do this for veterans in vocational rehabilitation. The current study attempted to provide a theoretical framework for understanding the decision to apply for a competitive job among veterans in VR who have histories of substance abuse and mental illness. Using a scenario format, MIRECC researchers Marcie Hebert, Psy.D. and Charles Drebing, Ph.D. examined whether behavioral economics is a useful theory for understanding vocational rehabilitation and job search decision-making. The study was also designed to determine factors most likely to motivate participants to engage in job search activities. Results document the relative salience of specific cost/benefit factors associated with likelihood of seeking employment. The most salient factors include intrinsic factors such as interest or sense of accomplishment in the job, extrinsic factors such as pay, discounting factors such as length of time until the job starts, and factors related to income effects such as housing costs. Results also suggest that altering the unit price of specific job characteristics leads to predictable changes in the probability of job search behaviors consistent with classic behavioral economic demand curves. These findings may provide specific ways to increase job search activity and increase VR success among participants with dual diagnosis.